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TOURNAMENT OFF

NCAA cancels men's and women's college basketball championships in response to virus outbreak

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CORONAVIRUS

'TOUGH DECISIONS AHEAD'

16 people test positive for coronavirus in NC as numbers continue to rise

JULIA WALL jwall@newsobserver.com

State Health Director Dr. Elizabeth Tilson, left, speaks with Dr. Bill Roper, interim president of the UNC system, before a Coronavirus Task Force meeting in Raleigh on Thursday.

BY WILL DORAN, MARTHA QUILLIN AND LUCILLE SHERMAN
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RALEIGH

With 16 cases of coronavirus illness and more expected, North Carolina took stronger measures Thursday to slow the spread of illness. Gov. Roy Cooper advised people to cancel, postpone or modify any event likely to draw 100 people or more, starting Friday.

He also asked all employers to encourage people who can work from home to do so.

The measures are voluntary. But Cooper said if officials see people aren't abiding by the guidance, they have the ability to change it to an order.

At a news conference Thursday afternoon where the restrictions were announced, Cooper said, "People are worried about what all this means for their families, their jobs, their incomes and their communities. Our actions today aim to lessen the long-term negative effects on our economy, as well as our health."

Cooper said the state would be looking for help from the federal government and that he would be talking with the N.C. General Assembly about ways to offset the cost of medical care for people who can't afford it and about the economic blow from event cancellations.

"We want to help those people," he said, adding that he would explore all the legal avenues available, possible unemployment benefits and small business aid.

THINGS 'MOVING EXCEPTIONALLY QUICKLY'

Earlier in the day, several dozen top leaders from the government and private sectors met at the North Carolina National Guard headquarters in Raleigh to discuss the latest on COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

"I think things are moving exceptionally quickly, which is why we need to move exceptionally quickly as well, " said Dr. Mandy Cohen, secretary of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services.

Cooper said that people should expect "some tough decisions" in the coming days,

SEE NC CASES, 5A

COMMENTARY

Duke president's decision spurred ACC tournament cancellation

BY LUKE DECOCK
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GREENSBORO

Finally, belatedly, Vincent Price was the adult in the room.

The Duke president was the only one who would put his foot down and say "no." That proceeding with the ACC tournament was the wrong move. That going ahead — like the Big East — even as the Big Ten and the Big 12 and the SEC and the Pac-12 and Conference USA and the WAC all canceled the rest of their tournaments was not only unwise but unfathomable.

When Price said Duke wouldn't come to the arena for its 3 p.m. game against N.C. State because the university was shutting down all athletic competition, it was the decision the commissioner and the other 14 presidents and the governor all refused to make.

That's what changed between 9:30 a.m. Thursday, when ACC commissioner John Swofford went on the ACC Network and insisted the tournament would go on in an empty building, and 12:02 p.m., when Florida State was pulled off the floor amid a barrage of cancellations from other conferences that piled one on top of each other.

Price didn't even know that when he called Swofford, emerging from consultations with his Board of Trustees with the decision already made. He

SEE DECOCK, 2A

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